

THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

Ordination Process for School of Ministry Students

A Guideline for Students and Churches

Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. 2 Timothy 2:15 NIV

Steps in the Ordination Process for School of Ministry Candidates

Approved by TABCOM's Commission on Ordained Ministry
January, 2024

GRADUATION: It is expected that all candidates beginning the ordination process via the School of Ministry (SoM) will have graduated from or be working towards graduation from the School of Ministry.

COMMITTEE INTRODUCTION

Ordination through The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts (TABCOM) is approved through the work of the Commission on Ordained Ministry (COOM). Under the COOM there are two committees: Ministerial Standing informally referred to as "Standing" (for those previously ordained through another denomination) and TABCOM Committee of Ministerial Preparation (MinPrep) referred to informally as "MinPrep." As a candidate for ordination, you will be working with MinPrep.

MinPrep consists of pastors and lay people from across the state (approximately 8-10 people). They will review all of the candidate's paperwork, meet with the candidate, discuss their progress, pray for the candidate and make the final decision as to the candidate's call and preparation for ministry. They DO NOT discuss or critique the theological section of the candidate's ordination paper.

The Association Committee on the Ministry (ACOM) is responsible for working with the candidate as they move through the ordination process. ACOM is comprised of people from the Candidate's Association.

The local Church Ordination Committee (COC) is comprised of lay leaders and the pastor of the church. The COC is responsible for discussing and critiquing the theological section of the Ordination Paper. They help the candidate articulate their theology.

Throughout this document, there are references to these four types of committees that support the candidate's journey towards ordination. To clearly identify each committee, the following mnemonics will be used.

- TABCOM = The American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts
- COOM = TABCOM's Committee on Ordained Ministry
- MinPrep = TABCOM's Committee of Ministerial Preparation
- ACOM = Association Committee on the Ministry
- COC = Local Church Ordination Committee

1. First Step in the Ordination Process (Church granting a preordination license)

(Previously referred to as a license to preach)

Ordination is the act of the church by which, in the name of God, it delegates to a qualified person who has responded to the call of God, a wide range of ministerial functions and responsibilities.

THE COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

The ordination process begins when a preordination license is granted by the church in which candidate is a member as defined by the local church. The church must be affiliated with a TABCOM Association.

To obtain such a license **the candidate shall:**

1. Be a person who has confessed Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior
2. Be a person of good reputation and emotional stability.
3. Be preparing for the Christian ministry as a professional vocation.

Candidate complete application for preordination license and arranges to meet with church leadership.

2. The church of the candidate shall:

1. Meet with the candidate regarding the Christian ministry of the local church.
2. Provide an opportunity for the candidate to preach and/or conduct public worship.
3. Vote to approve submission of a preordination license (by the leadership committee of the church)

Submit an application for a preordination license along with a photo and the designated fee to MinPrep. The application form must be submitted by the church and signed by the representative of the church.

4. Present the candidate with the preordination certificate which is provided by TABCOM COOM; Church assigns a mentor to the candidate.
5. Renew the preordination license annually with TABCOM COOM by submitting a renewal application and annual fee.

TABCOM will send a renewal reminder to the church annually, but it is the church's responsibility to vote for renewal and send the renewal application and fee to TABCOM each year. Should the church fail to renew the preordination license, the candidate's file will be permanently closed. Six renewals are allowed after the initial approval. Permission for additional renewals must be requested in a letter from the candidate to MinPrep, stating the reasons for the delay.

3. TABCOM's Committee on Ordained Ministry (COOM) shall:

1. Open and establish the candidate's file once the preordination application and fee has been submitted.
2. Keep a record of the licensing properly in the Registry of TABCOM.
3. Send information pertaining to the ordination process to the candidate and to the local church pastor or church clerk. (these forms will be sent to the candidate after the application and fee have been received.
 - a. CORI Background Request form requesting it be signed and witnessed (a copy of the candidate's license must accompany this form)
 - b. The Code of Ethics requesting it be signed and dated.
 - c. Self-Disclosure statement requesting it be signed by the candidate and witnessed.

THE COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

Notify the Chairperson of MinPrep, the Coordinator of Watchcare, the Association Coordinator, the ACOM, the Association Clerk, Moderator and Vice Moderator that a preordination license has been granted.

4. ACOM - Initial Interview

Within three months of the granting of a preordination license and receiving the three forms indicated on Page 3 (a-3) the candidate, and ACOM or its designated representative (s) will arrange a meeting with the candidate and the local church pastor for the purpose of:

- a. Becoming acquainted with the candidate and his/her Christian pilgrimage
- b. Exploring the candidate's fitness, aptitude, and commitment as a basis for preparing for ordained ministry.

In the ACOM interview the ACOM will provide guidance and counsel to the candidate and pastor regarding further steps to take in preparing for ordained ministry. Candidates coming to the ordination process through the School of Ministry should be referred by the ACOM to the MinPrep for an initial interview at the beginning of their journey towards ordination. This will give the MinPrep an opportunity to meet the candidate and answer any questions the candidate might have.

Following this meeting the ACOM will appoint an advisor to maintain contact with the candidate on an annual basis to provide guidance about the ordination process, in cooperation with the local church pastor. The ACOM will find ways to involve the candidate in the life and ministry of the Association.

The ACOM will send a brief summary of the interview (including any recommendations) to the candidate, with a copy sent to MinPrep. Should the candidate choose to respond to the summary, a copy of the response may be sent to MinPrep who will place it in the candidate's preordination file.

MinPrep – Initial Meeting

MinPrep's function is to assess the candidate's call, and to assure that all requirements for ordination have been met.

There will be an initial meeting with the MinPrep, after the pre-ordination license has been granted by the church, the application sent to TABCOM and the ACOM interview is held. The first interview will serve as a chance for the MinPrep to meet the candidate and with the candidate develop the Theological Education and Experience Plan based on the unique combination of education and experience that the candidate brings to the progress. The plan should include specific requirements yet to be fulfilled and specify the mechanisms by which fulfillment may be deemed satisfactory.

5. Next Steps in the Ordination Process

Ordination is the recognition by the church of one called by God into the Christian ministry as a professional vocation. During the ordination process the candidate will need to meet the following requirements demonstrating skill, maturity, and fitness for the job of an ordained ministry; The various steps will show evidence that the candidate has such a call by demonstrating:

THE COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

1. A commitment of life to Christian discipleship.
2. An inner conviction which the one called identifies as from God.
3. Possess those abilities as are requisite for a Christian minister.
4. An opportunity to render a ministry consistent with character of the American Baptist Churches – USA.
5. A call to the vocation of a professional Christian minister.
6. A dedication to the cause of Christ.
7. A character of moral integrity and responsibility.
8. A sufficient grasp of doctrine and polity to be entrusted with the pastoral oversight of a church.
9. A sufficient preparation for adequate performance of requisite ministerial functions.

Such evidence shall be gathered, presented, and transmitted by the candidate as outlined in the requirements below: The order in which these steps are completed is dependent upon the candidate's schedule and availability.

1) Transcript

The Candidate submits a copy of the transcript/certificate of completion signed by the registrar of the school or a letter from the registrar indicating the projected date of completion.

2) Watchcare

The candidate will initiate the Watchcare relationship by contacting the Coordinator of Watchcare for the MinPrep by emailing the coordinator at watchcare@tabcom.org. The coordinator will enroll the candidate in the Watchcare Program and assist the candidate in establishing the relationship with a suitable Watchcare Pastor. The Watchcare Pastor/Mentor cannot be the pastor at the candidate's home church (for more detailed information please refer to the Watchcare Guidelines). The Watchcare Coordinator will provide MinPrep with a statement of completion when the candidate has completed his/her Watchcare requirements which are outlined in the Watchcare Guidelines which is available on the TABCOM website.

3) Candidacy Assessment

Ordained ministry involves more than academic attainment; It calls for ongoing pastoral competence, emotional and spiritual maturity, and consistent Christian character. Therefore, candidates for ordination will complete a comprehensive career and candidacy assessment program sponsored by or in consultation with an American Baptist related Center for Career Development within five years prior to examination by MinPrep. Those who obtain a candidate assessment from the Center for Career Development in Nashua, NH will have a major portion of the cost subsidized by the Ministers and Missionaries Benefit Board (MMBB). This happens automatically when the candidate connects with the Center. Associations and local churches are encouraged to help defray any balance of candidate's cost.

The Candidate Evaluation is emailed directly to TABCOM MinPrep by the center about one month after the evaluation is conducted.

THE COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

The candidate grants a written release for the MinPrep to review the evaluation materials.. Evaluation materials submitted are sealed after an interview between the candidate and the MinPrep and may not be reopened without the consent of the candidate. No evaluation materials are shared outside of MinPrep.

4) Baptist History and Polity:

Candidate must complete a course on Baptist History and Polity. These are offered by TABCOM about twice a year for a nominal fee and involve attending the course usually over one or two days and writing a paper to be submitted to the instructor. Once the paper has been submitted, the instructor will inform COOM that the requirement has been met.

5) Ethics and Boundaries:

All candidates must complete a course on Personal Ethics and boundaries. These are offered by TABCOM about twice a year for a nominal fee and involve attending the course, usually over one or two days and writing a paper to be submitted to the instructor. Once the paper has been submitted, the instructor will inform COOM that the requirement has been met.

6) Summer Project

SoM candidates and their mentor will submit a summary of their summer project which will include details of their experience during the project. This Summer Projects eves as the internship requirement found in supporting documents.

7) Character References:

All candidates must submit four character references to COOM. One from each of the following:

1. Watchcare Pastor/Mentor – this is done automatically by your Watchcare Pastor.
2. A Lay person either in the church served by the candidate or in the licensing church.
3. An ordained minister of the candidate's choice.
4. The supervisor of the candidate's summer project.

These references shall include the following areas:

- A personal understanding of the candidate's call to ministry.
- Candidate's demonstrated gifts for ministry.
- Candidate's ability to work with others.
- Candidate's Leadership style (collaborative, long ranger, team builder, etc.
- Candidate's Personal relationships (Does candidate strive to build personal relationships but keep ethical boundaries)

Candidate's Character and how it fits with his/her call to ordained ministry.No letter of reference is acceptable from a fellow student or family member. Each reference shall be mailed directly to the TABCOM office, 189 Prescott Street, Groton, MA 01450 Attn: Min Prep. Or via email directly to minprep@tabcom.org

8) Personal Statement / Ordination Paper

During the ordination process the candidate will also be writing their ordination paper with the assistance of their church pastor, Watchcare pastor, and professors. ACOMs can also help with editing and formatting your paper, though it is not their function to question your theological understanding, only to assess if you can back up your theological understanding with scripture and experience.

The first part of the Ordination Paper consists of the following:

- A 3–5-page Personal Statement by the candidate which includes the following:
 - i. Personal Statement.
 - ii. Autobiographical sketch.
 - iii. Spiritual journey with emphasis on Christian experience, baptism, and call to the ministry.
 - iv. The candidate's understanding of and commitment to the American Baptist Churches, USA.

The second part of the Ordination Paper consists of the candidate's Theological Understanding on a variety of topics. These topics are as follows (candidate's theological understanding):

- God
- Jesus Christ
- Holy Spirit
- Humanity
- Salvation
- Scripture
- The Church (and its role in society and the world)
- The ordinances (baptism and the Lord's Supper)
- The candidate's attitude toward the American Baptist Churches USA, its ecumenical witness, and Code of Ethics
- Other issues –a narrative of other issues which are not included in the above, for which the candidate may have passion as a minister of the gospel.

6. MinPrep

Once **all** the requirements for ordination listed previously, except for the theological section of the ordination paper, have been completed, another interview will be scheduled with the MinPrep. As part of their review, the candidate will read the first section of the ordination paper which consists of the personal statement, autobiographical sketch, spiritual journey and call. It is not the function of the MinPrep to review the theological portion of the ordination paper. That function is left to the COC.

MinPrep meets quarterly. All paperwork must be submitted and in MinPrep possession by the first of the month in which the meeting will be held (for example all paperwork for the March meeting must be in the committee's hands by March 1st.)

THE COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

1) MinPrep – The Interview

The candidate will be asked to make a verbal presentation from his/her Personal Statement and then to answer questions asked by the MinPrep members. This interview will NOT include an examination of theology, except insofar as that theology is integral to the spiritual journey of the candidate.

MinPrep will determine its recommendation in an executive session.

One of the following options will be chosen.

1. The candidate can continue in the ordination process.
2. The candidate will be delayed until further preparations are completed.
3. The candidate can NOT proceed in the ordination process.

If the MinPrep is satisfied that the candidate is ready to proceed in the ordination process, the committee informs the COOM.

The chairperson of the MinPrep will notify the candidate, the licensing church, the Watchcare Pastor and the chairperson of the ACOM of the MinPrep vote.

If the candidate has not received a call to an ABC USA-related ministry, the recommendation is made conditional upon receiving such a call.

In the case of a delay, a committee member will be assigned to provide ongoing support; specific steps for further preparation will be recommended.

In the case of a denial, the COOM will authorize the file to be closed and the candidate's church notified.

7. ACOM - Final Interview

Following the recommendation by the MinPrep that the candidate proceed in the ordination process, the ACOM shall:

1. Review with the candidate his/her ordination paper which will be presented at the COC.
2. Make its own observation of the candidate's readiness for the ministry, which it may share with the COC.
3. Provide in written form to the ordaining church and to the clerk of the association a statement of the candidate's readiness for examination by a COC.
4. Work together to ensure that a COC is duly constituted for examination of the candidate, and in subsequent act of ordination all is done regularly and in order.
5. Be available to give counsel in planning the Ordination Service.

ORDINATION CAN NOT TAKE PLACE UNTIL THE CANDIDATE HAS A CALL TO MINISTRY

8. The Church Ordination Committee (COC)

The ordaining church, need the following documentary evidence to proceed:

- a. The recommendation of the MinPrep – Once the candidate has their final meeting with Min Prep, a letter confirming the committee's decision is sent to the candidate, the candidate's Church and the church's association.
- b. The recommendation of the ACOM

The church works with the Association Committee to call an Ordination Council made up of delegates and pastors in the association, with the chair of the association committee on ministry serving as the moderator of the Council and the association clerk, taking the minutes.

At the Ordination Council, the candidate shall read a prepared paper and be prepared to defend their beliefs.

It is recommended that copies of the ordination paper be distributed to participating churches ahead of time by email, posting on the Association website or by US Mail. The Association and the ordaining church share the cost of copying and mailing.

Subsequent to the examination of the candidate, the COC shall provide to the ordaining church, the candidate, the clerk of the Association and the COOM a written record of its action and recommendation relative to the candidate's readiness for ordination (either to proceed, to postpone action pending clarification or some stipulated contingency, or not to ordain the candidate).

A copy of the minutes of the Ordination Council, including the number of delegates present, the number of churches represented and the date set for the Service of Ordination (if available) should be mailed to MinPrep at the TABCOM office at 189 Prescott Street, Groton, MA 01450 or emailed to minprep@tabcom.org within seven days of the council. The ordination cannot take place until at least three weeks after the COC so that the ordination certificate can be prepared.

Whenever an Ordination Council votes that a church defer or not proceed with the ordination of a candidate, the following courses of action are open:

- a. The church may wait until the conditions that caused the adverse recommendation change sufficiently to warrant requesting the reexamination of the candidate.
- b. For a full review of the Ordination Council and the appeal process, see the "Standing Rules, COOM" "(these documents are kept in the office of the Executive Minister of TABCOM).

9. The Ordaining Church

Upon Receiving the recommendation to proceed, the ordaining church with the assistance of the association and the candidate shall arrange and conduct a service of ordination, allowing an interval of at least three weeks after the Ordination Council.

THE COMMITTEE ON ORDAINED MINISTRY
THE AMERICAN BAPTIST CHURCHES OF MASSACHUSETTS

The ordaining church shall notify the administrator of the date of the ordination service; a copy of the ordination service shall be sent to the COOM administrator for the candidate's file. An invitation to the ordination service shall be sent to the TABCOM Executive Minister.

The ordination certificate will be prepared by the COOM, signed by the chair of the COOM and the TABCOM Executive Minister. It will then be sent to the ordaining church who will then add signatures of a church representative and an appropriate association representative.

After the ordination service the candidate's file will be closed. Any request to reopen the file will be subject to the candidate's release.

TABCOM will notify the Commission on the Ministry of the American Baptist Churches USA of the ordination and record the ordination in the Registry of the American Baptist Churches of Massachusetts.

Candidate's Check List

(For Candidate's Use)

Use this as a checklist as you gather/complete the necessary documentation.

DOCUMENTS ARE SENT DIRECTLY TO TABCOM

Email: minprep@tabcom.org or by mail to
TABCOM, 189 Prescott Street, Groton, MA 01450, Attn: Min Prep

Application and Fee	an application for a preordination license and necessary fee to open a candidate's file must be mailed to TABCOM to open a candidate's file.
Photograph of Candidate	must be submitted with application.
Code of Ethics	A signed and witnessed Code of Ethics must be submitted to MinPrep.
Self-Disclosure & Release	A completed, signed and witnessed form must be submitted to MinPrep.
CORI Request Form	A completed and signed form, along with a copy of the candidate's license must be submitted to MinPrep.
Initial Meeting MinPrep	Candidates coming through the School of Ministry have an initial meeting with the MinPrep to develop a Theological education and experience plan.
Association Meeting	An initial interview will be scheduled by your association and the person(s) conducting the interview will submit a summary of the interview to MinPrep.
Educational Requirement	A transcript/certificate of completion signed by the registrar or a letter from the registrar indicating the projected date of completion.
Watchcare	Proof that the Watchcare Program has been completed.
Evaluation	Complete evaluation from approved Career Development Center which must be dated within five years prior to final meeting with MinPrep.
Summer Project	Detailed summary of summer project signed by Mentor
Four Character References	<input type="checkbox"/> Watchcare Pastor <input type="checkbox"/> Ordained Minister <input type="checkbox"/> Layperson <input type="checkbox"/> Summer Project Supervisor
Personal Statement	Submit a 3-5 page paper detailing the candidate's life story, call to ministry and spiritual journey; commitment to the American Baptist Churches, USA